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ANNETTE AURÉLIE DESMARAIS, *La Vía Campesina: globalization and the power of peasants*, London and Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, & Halifax: Fernwood Publishing 2007, xi, 238 pp.

La Vía Campesina: Globalization and the power of peasants is a notable work about an international, 'peasant'-led movement that attempts to counteract the idea of food and land as commodities within capitalist relations of production upheld by the WTO and other dominant actors in the global trade of foodstuffs. In line with anthropological studies of power and organisations, the author not only addresses contestations over the meanings of food, agriculture, development and the idea of peasanthood, but also treats the emergence of Vía Campesina (VC) as a politically-charged process within the domain of civil society. Much of this analysis of VC's organizational culture is left to the end of the book, however, and earlier chapters often leave little space between the moral stance of the subject under study and the author's own point of view. Indeed, although *La Vía Campesina* makes an indispensable contribution to our understanding of the most wide-ranging peasant movement in history, it is informed throughout by an overt political stance, which arguably strays from the critical tradition of social sciences such as anthropology.

Trained in geography, Desmarais centres on the various scales at which the primary actors (*i.e.*, the VC, NGOs, the WTO, the UN, transnational corporations, etc.) are situated, and highlights certain interrelations between people and place, 'North' and 'South', the local and the global. Yet this theoretical approach, as well as Desmarais's

position as an insider (at the date of publication, the author was a member of the VC technical support staff), has likely affected which discourses the author chooses to highlight and which are left out. Indeed, while she demonstrates an awareness of her 'privileged position' (p. 18) as an insider, Desmarais does not reflect upon the ethical implications of her own situated position and how this may have shaped the kind of data collected and the resulting analysis. For example, the VC's concept of food sovereignty—the notion that access to food should be inseparable from localized and culturally-valued ideas and actions—becomes the crux of the book's argument, while historical and social reasons why the more economically based notion of food security has gained legitimacy in global circles are largely absent.

Though Desmarais acknowledges the importance of treating ideas such as food sovereignty as discourses that contribute to community-formation (e.g., p. 38), her undue attention to the VC world view precludes her from demonstrating why the discourse of the market has become so prevalent, and so we remain unaware of how one may confront the latter on its own terms (if, indeed, this is the aim). Her ubiquitous contrasts between a 'political economy of profit' and a 'moral economy of provision' (p. 68, in reference to Parajuli 1996: 39) or equivalent polarities would be better treated as part of the very discursive scheme to be deconstructed, not least because market as well as community-based models for the economy have been historically legitimated in both political and moral terms (perhaps the best demonstration of a moral and political account of the market idea and ideal was given by Gunnar Myrdal in his seminal work: *The Political Element in the Development of Economic Theory*. 1953. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul). Such a perspective would have shed more light on the various historical actors at play who have determined the present-day position of 'peasants' on the world stage, a crucial starting point for any applied scholarship for change.

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